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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN/BRIGHAM AND USOAS/SNEFF

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PM](#) [POL](#) [SPECIALIST](#)

SUBJECT: OBSERVERS, OPACITY, AND A PLEDGE. PANAMA ELECTION  
COUNTDOWN #6: 7 WEEKS TO GO

REF: A. PANAMA 0564  
[1](#)B. PANAMA 0465

Summary: Observers, Opacity and a Pledge

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[1](#)1. (SBU) With less than two months to go, electoral issues are finally gaining prominence in Panama's media. Panamanian and foreign observers organize for the May 2 elections. Embassy plans to coordinate with OAS and Ombudsman's Office observers to ensure broad coverage of key polling areas on election day (although the Embassy has made clear that we are not official observers). Ombudsman Juan A. Tejada and Electoral prosecutor Gerardo Solis demanded an accounting of the Presidency's discretionary funds, but President Moscoso refused to cooperate. A lack of Party support and dissension in the ranks marred the signature ceremony for Political Party youth leaders' Electoral Ethics Pact and highlighted weaknesses in the Endara campaign, which has lost some steam. End Summary.

Electoral Tribunal in high gear

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[1](#)2. (SBU) Electoral Tribunal President Eduardo Valdes announced on a live TV talk show that 20,124 Panamanians have received Electoral Tribunal training for Election Day. Mostly between 18-25 years old, these individuals will supervise voting centers and staff individual precincts (called voting tables in Spanish). Each receives \$40 for working from 6:00 a.m. until past midnight. Electoral Tribunal authorities nationwide had a closed-door meeting over the weekend in Chiriqui Province for one final discussion of the "Plan General de Elecciones" (Overall Election Plan). Among other issues, they discussed how to interpret the formula for allocating legislative seats based on residual votes and voting for the handicapped.

Embassy, OAS election observers

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[1](#)3. (SBU) Embassy Panama will field 12-15 two-person non-official observer teams on election weekend (May 1-2) to report conditions in key areas. Likewise, the Defensoria del Pueblo (Ombudsman's Office) and the Organization for American States (OAS) plan to organize official observer teams for Panama's elections. OAS Country Director Hernan Hurtado Prem extended the tin cup to Embassy in a March 8 letter detailing proposed OAS plans to observe Panama's elections and a \$129,888 budget. Embassy has repeatedly turned down Electoral Tribunal and Washington-based electoral NGOs' funding requests, noting confidence in Panama's electoral system. EmbOffs are studying how to coordinate with OAS and Defensoria observers to ensure the best possible coverage of the country, while avoiding financial commitments or the public perception that Embassy teams are official observers.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Defensoria's Director for International Affairs Max Lopez and Director for Education and Human Rights Promotion Cesar Solano advised Embassy that they plan to field 300 Panamanian observers for the May 2 general elections, an ambitious plan considering human, financial, and logistical constraints. Also, Ombudsman Juan A. Tejada will use Electoral Tribunal funds to host Latin American Ombudsmen during the elections. Tejada estimates that between 7-10 Ombudsmen will observe elections in remote areas of Panama. Solano plans to meet Electoral Tribunal authorities to discuss the scope of observation. Like Embassy Panama, the Defensoria will pay special attention to the Ngobe-Bugle (indigenous) Reservation, which will be electing legislators for the first time.

Moscoso says mind your own beeswax

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15. (SBU) Controversy over how President Moscoso is using her discretionary budget allotment continues. Electoral Prosecutor Gerardo Solis met privately at the Presidential Palace with Economy and Finance Minister Norberto Delgado, Minister of the Presidency Mirna Pitti and Comptroller General Alvin Weeden. Solis confirmed media accounts to PolOffs that he requested the GOP provide him a "finiquito" (a list of check recipients and justification for the checks) in lieu of a full-blown inspection. Comptroller Weeden criticized Solis, a Perez Balladares (PRD)-appointee for playing politics. (NOTE: Solis' father, Menalco Solis, manages Solidarity Party Presidential Candidate Guillermo Endara's campaign. Some have alleged the money was used to renovate former Minister of the Presidency Yvonne Young's house. END NOTE.) Solis added that he believes the GOP will seek a way to remove him from office for abuse of authority, knowing that its control of the Supreme Court will allow them to quash appeals.

16. (SBU) Two officials from the Defensoria del Pueblo (Ombudsman's Office) predicted that Moscoso would refuse to publish her use of the discretionary funds as the Defensoria requested under Panama's Transparency Law. Providing the requested information would set a precedent that political heavyweights find threatening. Ombudsman Juan A. Tejada said after waiting the 30 days that the law grants Minister Pitti to release the information, he will submit a habeas data request to the Supreme Court. Defensoria staff believes the GOP-controlled Supreme Court would deny such a request.

Would Martinelli vote for opponent?

17. (SBU) In a 30-minute TV interview by well-known boxing commentator Juan Carlos Tapia during his popular program called The Best of Boxing, Cambio Democratico presidential candidate Ricardo Martinelli stated that if he were not running himself, he would vote for Arnulfista candidate Jose Miguel Aleman. Surprised when asked, Martinelli's first asked if voiding his vote was an option. When Tapia said no and pressed him, Martinelli said he would vote for Aleman, but only if he distances himself from President Moscoso, a difficult prospect for most Panamanians to imagine. Martinelli's campaign manager told PolOff that Martinelli chose the lesser threat Aleman because whereas CD's internal "likely voter" polls show Aleman at 11.5%, Torrijos is at 50%. Martinelli insisted during the interview that he and his associates are not "traditional politicians", but businessmen and managers who want to make a difference. As in the past, Martinelli criticized traditional parties and recent public opinion polls.

Youth pledge to play fair - kind of

18. (SBU) On Wednesday, representatives of the Political Parties Youth Forum signed an electoral ethics pact promising to promote an open, transparent, democratic and participatory May 2 election. The Pact explicitly endorses the Electoral Tribunal. Promoters hoped to use the disorganized and poorly attended event to foment a more active and influential political role for youth leaders despite snubs from the older generation in their own parties. Representatives from all legally registered political parties except the Solidarity Party signed the pact. Martin Torrijos (PRD) was the only Presidential Candidate who showed up, but he departed before the event began, leaving PRD legislator Hector Aleman behind to attend to the youth. Cambio Democratico (CD) First Vice Presidential candidate Roberto Henriquez also attended. No ranking representatives of Arnulfista candidate Jose Miguel Aleman participated. Solidarity Party youth leaders didn't participate because they believe the Electoral Tribunal (ET) is too responsive to partisan pressures. Only PRD, MOLIRENA, and CD youth showed up in large numbers.

110. (SBU) COMMENT: By boycotting the event, Solidarity is snubbing the Tribunal for what Solidarity believes is the Tribunal's favoritism to the Arnulfistas. For instance, giving President Moscoso sole rights to the image of former President Arnulfo Arias. Panamanian analysts believe the Endara team's attacks on the Electoral Tribunal only serve to highlight weaknesses in his campaign. Print media have reported recent defections from Solidarity to other political camps as significant symptoms of campaign sickness in the Endara camp. Also several influential supporters have either distanced themselves from Endara or abandoned his campaign, disgusted by the domineering yet clumsy tactics of campaign manager Menalco Solis.